23115 Pelham

LETTER

ON

PARLIAMENTARY REFORM,

&c. &c.

486

LETTER

ON

PARLIAMENTARY REFORM,

CONTAINING

A SHORT REVIEW

OF THE

ORIGIN AND CONSTITUTION

OF

PARLIAMENTS;

WITH

OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

PETITION PRESENTED BY MR. GREY,

AND

ON SOME OF THE ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST IT.

LONDON:

1793.

LETTER

ON

PARLIAMENTARY REFORM,

&c. &c.

MY DEAR SIR,

I AM much obliged to you for your letter on the ſubject of Parliamentary Reform; my own opinion, which I ſhall freely give you on that head, will be backed by ſuch authorities, as I am convinced muſt ſtrengthen yours on the neceſſity of ſuch a meaſure taking place—Your remarks are ſtrong, judicious, and ſatisfactory; but, after ſtating to me very firmly what appears to ſhew the abſolute neceſſity of a Reform, you then ſhrink back from the queſtion, as if alarmed at the magnitude of the object,

frightened at the difficulty of the attempt, or dismayed by the chance of success—You tell me that it is the decided opinion of all the better and most rational part of the society you keep in your county, that the present representation of the people is inadequate, that its Members are liable to corruption, and consequently the people to the loss of *liberty*. You tell me of intolerable grievances; you tell me of a load of taxes more than can be borne; you tell me that we are now plunged into a war; you then conclude by telling me, that this Reform, however so desirable an object, may be improper to be pursued at this time——At this time—here, I confess, I do not understand you; that the Minister, a Borough-holder, or a Borough-monger, should make use of such language, is natural enough; but for an independent gentleman to do it, is unaccountable. You, my dear Sir, I am convinced, have too much good sense to have been humbugged by the ministerial manœuvre of the late *alarm*: and seeing things in their proper light, a little consideration will suggest to you that firmness and moderation may bring about quietly

that

that Reform, which, if delayed, can only be accompliſhed by deſperation or convulſion. Your objections about bringing this queſtion forward now, on the ground of our being at war, or on the ſuppoſed prevalency of French principles, I ſhall, I flatter myſelf, do entirely away in the courſe of this letter.

You have ſtated to me the diſtreſſes of the country; you have ſtated to me the intolerable burden of the taxes; you have ſtated to me the uncommon hardſhips of the labouring poor—From the preſent poſture of affairs, is the probability the moſt likely, that theſe grievances will be ſhortly redreſſed or augmented? Till we can diſcover that the conſequences of a war bring on a diminution of taxes, we muſt anſwer No—Taxes not only affect the luxuries, but ultimately fall heavy on the very neceſſaries of life. The Abbé Raynal obſerves, that to ſell the produce of the earth to the people at a high price, is, in fact, to deprive them of it; it wreſts from them, by a tax, the moſt natural means of preſerving life, and, in fact, affects the very principles of their exiſtence. Surely, then, it

behoves us to watch over the intereſts of the poor, who are ſo materially concerned by the profuſe grants of the repreſentatives of the people—more particularly does it become our duty, when we are convinced that this repreſentation is inadequate; that it is nominal, inſtead of real; and that, by delaying its Reform, we, inſtead of leſſening, augment the evil.

By an unaccountable, abſurd notion, ſome perſons are as alarmed at the word *Reform*, as much as if it implied *Revolution*, or total ſubverſion of Government. You annex no alarming ideas to the words reformation, renovation; why then to reform? what does it mean, but a change from worſe to better?—Oh! but this is a Reform of Parliament; and Parliaments have ſhewn no diſpoſition to reform themſelves.——When we come to examine the real conſtitution of Parliament, and inquire into the different modifications it has undergone—when we find that its different deviations from its original form have tended more to its own aggrandizement, than to the ſecuring the liberties of the people, we then ſhall ceaſe to wonder that the majority in Parliament may vote againſt a reform—But is this,

Sir,

Sir, a reaſon that you ſhould deſiſt from obtaining ſo deſireable an object? On the contrary, it is a reaſon why you ſhould perſevere—The neceſſity of this meaſure is not to be founded upon the number of its Advocates among the repreſentatives of the people, but upon that number among the people themſelves. On the next agitation of this queſtion in Parliament, let us ſuppoſe the minority to be ſtill ſmaller; ſtill it is the more incumbent on the people to pour in their petitions, and to endeavour, by every conſtitutional mode, to obtain their demands—The majority is to be collected from us; we have been injured in our rights, and it is we that claim redreſs. I muſt correct you when you call the petition preſented by Mr. Grey, the petition of the Friends of the People aſſociated for the purpoſe of obtaining Parliamentary Reform: it certainly originated with them; but it was preſented to the Houſe as the petition of ſeveral of the inhabitants of London and its environs.—The laws allow the right of the people to preſent petitions, both individually and collectively.

You know my opinion in regard to political

litical aſſociations; but when Government has recourſe to ſuch meetings to ſupport its meaſures, it naturally muſt create a jealouſy in the People: and when we find the tenor of theſe aſſociations to be inſtituted more for throwing an unconſtitutional weight into the hands of Miniſters, than for guarding the liberties of the people; the neceſſity of the caſe, and ſelf-defence, will make counter-aſſociations ariſe—I defy, then, Mr. Reeves, at the head of all his aſſociations, to ſay that the principles of the petitioners for Parliamentary Reform, are not the moſt conformable to the true principles of the conſtitution—The petitioners are for the correction of abuſes, the others for their perpetuation.

I am glad, however, for this reaſon, you have delayed your petition, as you now have had an opportunity of hearing what has been ſaid on both ſides, and the ſubterfuges that have been made uſe of to blink this important queſtion.

If you will permit, we will take a ſhort review of the origin and conſtitution of Parliament; we ſhall then ſee what modi-

fications

fications it has undergone, the deviations from its ancient form, and in what inſtances to the decided injury of the conſtituent body —we will then examine the petition we have been ſpeaking of for obtaining a redreſs of theſe grievances, and ſome of the arguments made uſe of for and againſt it— In this I ſhall be as conciſe as poſſible— a ſtatement of facts does not require ornament of language ; truth needs only to be ſhewn.

The conſtituent parts of Parliament are the Houſe of Commons, the Houſe of Lords, and the King. By the queſtion of Parliamentary Reform, I take for granted you only mean as far as regards the former; you do not wiſh to diſturb the good Lords the Biſhops, or the bed-chamber Lords— it is to the repreſentation, then, only of the people we will ſuppoſe Reform to attach.

Let us proceed with candour and moderation, not retaliating the calumny endeavoured to be thrown upon the people at large, and regardleſs of the contempt in which their opinions are affected to be held. By keeping to conſtitutional ground we cannot err, and we ſhall be accompanied

by

by ſuch uncontroverted authorities in the way, that nothing on our part will be wanted to obtain the end, but firmneſs and perſeverance. In our progreſs we ſhall find the exiſting right of the people to reſiſtance in caſes of neceſſity; and that never-to-be-forgotten truth, that *the voice of the People is the voice of God.*

Parliaments, or, as they were formerly called, general Councils, are coeval with the kingdom itſelf—The word Parliament did not obtain till about the middle of the 12th century, and was applied under Louis the 7th in France to general aſſemblies—but long before the introduction of the Norman language into England, theſe great councils of the realm, or general aſſemblies, were convened, to debate upon, and to ſettle, all matters of importance—Various have been the denomination of theſe aſſemblies, as Great Council, Great Meeting, the Meeting of Wiſe Men; and in Latin, *Commune Concilium Regni*; *Magnum Concilium Regis*; *Curia Magna*; *Conventus Magnatum* vel *Procerum*; *& Communitas Regni Angliæ.* Remains of this ancient conſtitution are ſtill to be met with in ſeveral northern States

States—How theſe Parliaments were compoſed has never been clearly aſcertained.—The firſt Norman Princes aſſembled theſe great councils. In the 17th year of the reign of King John we have the Great Charter, wherein he is bound to ſummon Biſhops, Earls, and great Barons perſonally, and other tennants in chief under the Crown, to meet within a limited time, to aſſeſs aids, ſcutages, &c.—Alſo in the reign of Henry the Third, in the year 1266, there are writs ſtill extant from that date, to ſummon knights, citizens, and burgeſſes to Parliament. The conſtitution, then, of Parliament, as it now ſtands, conſiſting of King, Lords, and Commons, has exiſted upwards of 500 years—The baſis of the conſtitution of England is this, that to Parliament alone belongs the power to make laws, to annul them, to change, and to explain them.

But in almoſt all the kingdoms of Europe the authority of the Prince is placed before the law, and cuſtom has ſo far confounded the right with the fact, that the civilians have looked upon the legiſlative power as if eſſentially attached to the qua-

lity of King; and that the plenitude of his power neceſſarily flows from the definition of his title.—The Engliſh, happily placed under more favourable circumſtances, have judged differently; they have not thought that the deſtiny of men ſhould depend upon a play of words, or upon ſcholaſtic ſubtilities; and they only have attached to the word King, the ſame ideas that the Latins have to the word *Rex*.—We have yet wiſely given prerogatives to the King, that are founded on good reaſon; among others, he has the power of aſſembling, proroguing, or diſſolving the Parliament.

The Houſe of Commons, otherwiſe the Aſſembly of the Repreſentatives of the Nation, is compoſed of the Deputies from the different counties, cities, and borough towns—The neceſſary qualifications to repreſent the former, is a poſſeſſion of 600l. per annum, landed eſtate, and 300l. per annum for the two latter.—Here, at the firſt view, ſeems a kind of ſurety for the people, by chuſing none but men of reſponſibility for their repreſentatives, and ſuch as were thought not liable to corruption—In their election, Peers ought by no means

to

to interfere; they have privileges of their own; and the wiſdom of our anceſtors has always been to keep the three eſtates diſtinct and ſeparate. Their union would be productive of tyranny. The excellence of the Britiſh conſtitution conſiſts in this, that all the parts of it form a mutual check upon each other.

But we find, that all the barriers which defended the people againſt the incurſions of power have been overturned; nay, Parliament itſelf, during its diſmay, has been induced to decree, that *proclamations*, that is to ſay, the will of the King, ſhould be law: by this the conſtitution was nearly annihilated. This enormous maſs of abuſes, which had been ſuffered to accumulate, or had been confirmed during the ſeveral ſucceſſive reigns from the two firſt Henries, was entirely ſwept away, and the ancient laws eſtabliſhed—This Reform ſo extenſive, and which we may be allowed to call a ſecond creation of the conſtitution, was accompliſhed without producing any convulſion.

The time of aſſembling Parliaments was as follows: by the ſtatute of Ed. III. c. 14, the King was bound to convoke one,

once every year, and more often if need be: this was frequently evaded, by the King conſtituting himſelf ſole judge of the neceſſity, and endeavouring to govern without one—This cauſed the ſtatute 36 Ed. III. c. 10—That for maintenance of the ſtatutes, and redreſs of grievances, a Parliament ſhould be holden every year. This was to be a new Parliament, not a ſeſſion of a former Parliament, and this was the uſage for 69 years after: we find, then, moſt evidently, that annual Parliaments are the ancient conſtitution of England.

This, however poſitively enjoined by theſe ſtatutes, and thus become the law of the land, was conſidered as ſuch a check upon thoſe Monarchs who were inclined to déſpotiſm, that the convoking of annual Parliaments was neglected ſometimes for a conſiderable period—this occaſioned the ſtatute of 18 Car. I. c. 1. which enacted that the holding of Parliaments ſhall not be omitted above three years at moſt. Several ſubſequent ſtatutes to this purpoſe have been made

Parliament, compoſed of the three conſtituent parts, has ſovereign and uncontroulable

lable authority: it can regulate or change the ſucceſſion to the Crown, as was done in the reign of Henry the Eighth and William the Third. It can alter the eſtabliſhed religion, as was ſeveral times done in the reign of Henry the Eighth, and his three children. It can change, and create afreſh, even the conſtitution of the Kingdom, and of Parliaments themſelves: this was done by the act of Union, and the ſtatutes of William the Third, for triennial, and thoſe of George the Firſt, for ſeptennial elections—Whatever, then, human power is competent to, ſo is Parliament—It is a matter, then, of the firſt conſideration to the liberties of the kingdom, that ſuch men be delegated to this important truſt, who are the moſt eminent for probity, fortitude, and knowledge: that the choice of the people alſo be free and unſhackled; that its repreſentatives be uncorrupt; for it is an admitted maxim that England can only be ruined by a corrupt Parliament—Monteſquieu obſerves that the conſtitution of England may in time periſh; he foretells that it will periſh whenever the ligiſlative power ſhall become more corrupt

corrupt than the executive. — We find, then, an aſſembly delegated by the people only for three years, enacting their continuance for *ſeven*, and this under the pretence of preventing the great and continued expences of frequent elections, and the violent heats and animoſities conſequent thereon, and for the peace and ſecurity of the Government.—Admitting ſuch to be the real ground, all theſe advantages would ſurely have been more effectually ſecured, had they prolonged the term to fourteen inſtead of ſeven years, or voted that their ſitting ſhould be during the life of the Prince—We have already ſeen they were competent to do this, if the people made no reſiſtance to ſuch a violent infringement upon their rights—that the people poſſeſs this right of reſiſtance againſt arbitrary power, and the infringement of their liberties, has been univerſally admitted. In ſupport of this, read the following extract from a moſt approved writer on our conſtitution: "What would be the reſource "of the people in ſuch caſe, where the "prince, ſuddenly burſting all the bounds "ſet to his authority, and placing himſelf

" above the conſtitution, ſhould neither " regard any longer the perſon nor the " property of the citizen, and ſhould " attempt to reign without a Parliament, " or force them to ſubſcribe to his will? " it would be reſiſtance!—This is ſuffi- " cient to our purpoſe; and by the laws " of England it is ſo decided; and by them " reſiſtance is regarded as the legitimate " and final reſource againſt the violences " of power—It was this reſiſtance which " procured us *Magna Charta*, the founda- " tion of our liberties; and the exceſs of " one power eſtabliſhed by means of force, " was reſtrained by force."—Lord Litte- ton obſerves, that if the privileges of the people of England are from conceſſions of the crown; the power of the crown itſelf, is it not from the conceſſions of the people?

You will obſerve the different Reforms that have taken place in Parliament, although in almoſt all the inſtances againſt the liberty of the conſtituent body, have been accom- pliſhed without violence—ſurely then there can be no dread of convulſion from a Reform that would only tend to ſecure that liberty, and to do juſtice to the demands of the people.

people.—You will alſo obſerve, that when the blindneſs of the Government has madly oppoſed the redreſs of grievances, ſo as to drive the people to reſiſtance, that every revolution which has happened in England, (different to what has been the caſe in moſt other countries), has always ended in confirming and augmenting their liberty.

From the above ſhort ſtatement of the original conſtitution of Parliament, we learn that, in many inſtances, ſeveral princes have wiſhed to govern without them—That in defiance of ſtatutes that enjoined the frequent aſſembly of them, they were not convoked—That from annual Parliaments having been the ancient conſtitution of the land, they became triennial; and from that, ſeptennial;—and by the ſame reaſon they might have voted themſelves perpetual. — A Reform of Parliament is, then, no innovation; we have ſeen that it has undergone ſeveral, without changing, in the leaſt, the form of government.

Improving, then, the repreſentation, and leſſening the duration of Parliaments, inſtead of an innovation to be dreaded, will

be

be an infuſion of freſh ſtrength and vigour into the conſtitution; which without ſuch timely help will either fall a ſacrifice to irremediable decay, or to ſudden convulſion.

The petition preſented by Mr. Grey is univerſally allowed to be one of the beſt drawn up political compoſitions, in point of ſtyle and language, that has ever appeared —Although it is very long, and contains a ſtatement of grievances which are facts, it never breaks out into invective or violence, but, having truth and juſtice for its ſupport, is modeſt and reſpectful.

It is now printed, and in general circulation, therefore it would be unneceſſary to examine more than its moſt prominent features—as no comment can do it juſtice, you muſt have recourſe to the petition itſelf.—It begins by ſtating the conſtituent parts of Parliament, which are King, Lords, and Commons or the repreſentatives of the people. That according to the true ſpirit of the conſtitution, and true meaning of the word "repreſentation," the Houſe of Commons do not fully and fairly repreſent the people, &c. It then ſtates four different

grounds of complaint—It complains that the number of repreſentatives aſſigned to the different counties is groſſly diſproportioned to their comparative extent, population, and trade—that the elective franchiſe is ſo partially and unequally diſtributed, that the majority of the Commons is elected by leſs than fifteen thouſand Electors; which at taking the adults at ſo low a number as three millions, is not more than the two hundredth part to be repreſented—that the right of voting is regulated by no uniform or rational principle—that the elective franchiſe is only renewed once in ſeven years.

In ſupport of the firſt complaint, the inſtances of Rutland and Yorkſhire bearing an equal rank in the ſcale of county repreſentation, and that Cornwall alone ſhould return more members than Yorkſhire, Rutland, and Middleſex together, will be ſufficient to ſelect. In ſupport of the ſecond, a correct ſcale of the repreſentation is produced, by which it very ſatisfactorily appears, that two hundred and ninety four members, forming a majority of the entire Houſe of Commons, are returned by places

that

that have the feweſt number of voters, and ſome of theſe places having very few voters indeed—and this the petitioners are ready to prove.

The complicated rights of voting, on which the third complaint is founded, are as numerous as they are capricious—The petitioners recite them, and the different inconveniences ariſing from ſuch an incongruous ſyſtem of repreſentation.

The laſt complaint of the petitioners is the length of the duration of Parliaments, and it prays that they may not be continued for ſeven years — We have before ſeen how they have been extended to that term.

In juſtification of the preſent application of the petitioners, they ſtate the abuſes, and inconveniencies that have ariſen from the above cauſes; from the combined operation of thoſe defects, ariſe ſcenes of confuſion, litigation and expence, and from the private patronage which is ſo repugnant to the ſpirit of free repreſentation — the tumults, diſorders, and perjuries, too often the dreadful attendants of conteſted elections, the manner of taking the polls, &c.

The truth of all theſe miſchiefs aſcertained by the difficulties which the Houſe experiences in attending to the variety of complaints brought before it, &c—the patronage of which the petitioners complain is of two kinds: one from the unequal diſtribution of the elective franchiſe, and the peculiar rights of voting, by which certain places return members to ſerve in Parliaments; the other from the expence attending conteſted elections, and the conſequent degree of power acquired by wealth, &c. By the operation of the firſt ſpecies of patronage, *eighty four* individuals do, by their own immediate authority, ſend *one hundred and fifty-ſeven* members to Parliament.—The ſecond cannot be ſhewn with equal accuracy, though it is felt with equal force. In ſhort, it appears that *one hundred and fifty-four* powerful individuals return three hundred and ſeven members,—a decided majority.

We have before ſeen that no Peer of the Realm has a right to concern himſelf in the election of members to ſerve the Commons in Parliament. The petitioners are ready to prove that they have the moſt reaſonable

ſonable grounds to ſuſpect, that no leſs than one hundred and fifty members owe their elections entirely to the interference of Peers; and that forty Peers have poſſeſſed themſelves of ſo many ſmall boroughs, as to be able to return eighty-one members.—The means taken by Candidates to obtain ſeats in the Houſe of Commons, and by electors to beſtow that honour, evidently appear to have been increaſing in a progreſſive degree of fraud and corruption.—This aſſertion is grounded by the legiſlature finding it neceſſary to ſwell the ſtatute book with laws for the prevention of thoſe offences. The petitioners, led to conjecture that the increaſed national debt, and the conſequent increaſe of the influence, are the cauſes, there is annexed a table which ſtates, that at the revolution, *the public revenue* did not exceed 2,100,000l., *the peace eſtabliſhment* 1,900,000l. ſtatutes to preſerve the freedom and independance of Parliament, to prevent bribery, &c., amounted to 14; in the 31ſt year of the reign of his preſent Majeſty, the public revenue had increaſed to above 16,000,000, the peace eſtabliſhment to above 5,000,000—ſtatutes to preſerve

ſerve freedom of Parliament, to prevent bribery, &c. to 65—from the above ſtatement, the petitioners think it high time to make their inquiries, and expreſs their anxiety to preſerve a conſtitution they love and admire. The petition concludes with a recapitulation of the four general complaints, the object of its prayer.

From having conſulted the origin and conſtitution of Parliament, and having conſidered the above petition, which, notwithſtanding it recites an enormous maſs of abuſes, breathes the ſpirit of candour and moderation; we ſhould be blind or infatuated to the laſt degree, were we to heſitate in declaring, that the repreſentation of the people is ſhamefully defective, and not according to the true ſpirit of the conſtitution; that the elective franchiſe is partial and capricious, and in many inſtances ſubject to the influence of powerful individuals; that the extenſion of the duration of Parliaments is an infringement upon the rights of the electors: and ſtill more blind and infatuated ſhould we be, were we to ſay, that theſe grievances do not demand a Reform.—There is a great propriety in the

petition

petition not pointing out the plan of a Reform; it ſtates the neceſſity of the meaſure, and leaves to the wiſdom of the Houſe the mode of carrying it into execution.

We will now proceed to take a ſhort review of ſome of the arguments made uſe of on both ſides, on this important queſtion. The different ſubterfuges that are uſed by the former advocates of Reform now to blink, and get rid of it, will be found curious enough—Almoſt every one admits the neceſſity of ſome meaſure or other to be adopted; and ſome ſay it muſt be delayed, without being able to aſſign any good reaſon why or wherefore. Fortunately the few that are totally againſt it, adopt ſuch reaſons in ſupport of their opinions, as, inſtead of making againſt the queſtion, make directly for it:—as, for inſtance, one gentleman gets up, and very modeſtly aſſerts that the preſent repreſentation is fully adequate; that the country gentlemen have intereſts to attend to, and particular departments to watch over in their own counties, that muſt neceſſarily incapacitate them from the functions of the ſtate.—Such men returned by the landholders,

holders, would be merely repreſentatives of the landed intereſt; thoſe by merchants, would be a mercantile repreſentation; but the preſent mode was a repreſentation of ſtateſmen, qualified by habits and debate to manage the affairs of the nation, the military, navy, &c. &c.—Bravo! my noble ſtateſman—ſo you would reject the country gentlemen and merchants, who repreſent the landed and mercantile intereſt! and why? becauſe they are not ſtateſmen.—He ſeems to lament that the number of *rotten boroughs* are diminiſhed; becauſe had *he* the framing of a Houſe of Commons, he would have a number of cloſe boroughs of not above fifteen electors; for various deſcriptions of perſons were neceſſary — for what? to do the dirty work, and vote through thick and thin! — However he need not alarm himſelf, the people will not give *him* the trouble to frame a Houſe of Commons for them. — Another ſays, government did not come *from* the people, but *for* the people.—Whence, then, did it come? Did any of our adorable, divine-right Kings bring it with them, *for* us, *from* Heaven; or did we receive it from

ſome

ſome other heaven-born miniſter? Government that is good, and not deſpotic, muſt originate *from* the people; it is a truſt *from* them, to be exerciſe *for* their general welfare.—In oppoſition to Reform, now comes forward our immaculate miniſter, its *quondam* advocate, and, with the moſt inſulting effrontery, ſtands an apoſtate to his opinions, and to the cauſe he once ſo warmly ſupported. His ſituation, we muſt allow, was ſomewhat critical; reverting to his former opinions, and eating up his words, is but an unpleaſant and operoſe buſineſs: ſo to extricate himſelf from this dilemma, he gives one great gulp, ſwallows them all, and inſtantly has recourſe to the ſtale deſcription of French horrors, and French principles. Having ſucceeded by alarming the country with thoſe deſcriptions, he make uſe of them again, and by rouſing the feelings and paſſions of his auditors, attempts to biaſs their jndgements—he ſays univerſal ſuffrage would bring on anarchy. The petition does not go to univerſal repreſentation, it only ſtates that the preſent one is groſſly diſproportionate.—From a farago of French affairs, he proceeds in

calumniating the people—he tells you that the ſpirit of diſaffection which had been thus raiſed, was happily kept under, by the ſeaſonable interference of the legiſlature, the vigilance and exertions of the executive power, and the interpoſition of providence, whom he thus modeſtly joins to his adminiſtration.—He objects to many of the petitions, becauſe they reſemble each other; is it ſurpriſing that petitions, whoſe object is the ſame, and whoſe prayer beg the ſame redreſs, ſhould be alike? After attempting to frighten you with the dangerous tendency of French principles, he effectually baniſhes all alarm, by telling you that 99 out of a hundred are loyal and well affected to the conſtitution.—The danger, then, that he would endeavour to ſhew, by agitating the queſtion now, entirely vaniſhes; a ſecond objection which ſome made, on our being engaged in a war, he does not urge; I believe, that is becoming every day a more tender ſubject with him.—He objects becauſe the petition demands no ſpecific relief. The grivances ſtated are ſo glaring as to point out themſelves the nature of the relief.

You

You will obſerve, Sir, that not one argument has been uſed of ſufficient force that ought to make you change your opinion. Did Mr. Pitt, when he brought forward this queſtion, ſay, that theſe grievances were imaginary, that they were wild and illuſive theories?—Come forward, then, thou immaculate miniſter, "out of thy own mouth will I convict thee," and if thou doſt not wrap thyſelf up in ſullen ſilence, repeat theſe thy own words, "*without a Reform of Parliament, the li-*
"*berty of the ſubject cannot be preſerved;*
"*nor can we expect to have a wiſe, vir-*
"*tuous, or a diſintereſted adminiſtration.*"
Thou now mayſt go back, I have done with thee, for thou ſayſt, we cannot expect that thou ſhouldſt be wiſe, virtuous, or diſintereſted—in corroboration of thy own argument, was it wiſe, at the commencement of a war, to diſguſt the whole army, by the appointment of the Hon. Mr. Hope to a Lieutenant Colonelcy, when there are Officers that have had the rank of Major previous to his entering the army, and from which rank they have not yet been promoted? was it virtuous or diſinte-

reſted to do it, becauſe Mr. Dundas had married that gentleman's relation?

The objections to the Reform ſeem to be fixed only upon two points, thoſe are from our being at war, and the dangerous tendency of French principles; for all parties are nearly agreed in regard to the neceſſity of the meaſure.—Mr. Pitt himſelf moved for a Reform during the American war; this was a time of ten times the danger as the preſent; becauſe the American war was a war againſt the Government of this country, a war which affected the very vitals of the conſtitution.

The reſiſtance of America was ſtyled a rebellion; on the nature of which, the opinions at home were greatly divided. What, then, is the comparative ſituation now of this country? It is aſſerted, that ninety-nine out of a hundred are firmly attached to the conſtitution, and inſtead of having a rebellion to reſiſt, and almoſt all Europe againſt us, we are only engaged in a war with a ſingle enemy — but had a Reform taken place, and the corruption in Parliament been checked, the ſeparation of America would not have taken place,

nor

nor would ſhe and France be now either of them a republic—It is ſtrenuouſly urged that the conſtitution has power in itſelf to correct abuſes; and the prophecy of the late Lord Chatham is quoted that the preſent repreſentation will not outlive the preſent century. A reaſon, therefore, why Parliament had better give with a good grace, what it muſt be obliged to concede —had the late King of France, at his acceſſion, made only a few conceſſions, the whole of the dreadful evils that have ſince happened in France would have been avoided.

Mr. Fox, in a moſt able and manly ſpeech, refutes every argument made uſe of by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whoſe recantation, and change of ſentiments on Parliamentary Reform, he proves to be grounded on no ſolid reaſons—he denys that univerſal ſuffrage is the object; the wild ſcheme of the Duke of Richmond's —he declares his own decided diſlike to univerſal repreſentation; he removes every objection made in reſpect to the time; and does away every idea of there being any danger from French principles—he obſerves: "would any man now ſay that

"French

" French principles are faſcinating? What " then had we to fear from what no man " in his ſenſes would wiſh to copy? Did " the Houſe of Commons, as at preſent " conſtituted, anſwer the purpoſes which " it was intended to anſwer; and had the " people any ſecurity that it would con- " tinue to do ſo? To both branches of " the queſtion he anſwered decidedly in " the negative.— Repreſentation was the " univerſal panacea, the cure for every " evil: let us give, then, to the people, " not the unreal mockery, but the efficient " ſubſtance of repreſentation." To attempt to follow Mr. Fox, and, in a mutilated ſtate, to give you any idea of the force of his arguments, would be impoſſible, and lead to too great length; you muſt have recourſe to the ſpeech itſelf.

The objections, then, that the time is improper, and the tendency of French principles being dangerous, are fallacious and abſurd—we ſee at this time in Ireland the creation nearly of a ſecond conſtitution to have taken place, by the affranchiſement of the Roman Catholics, and the admiſſion of near 3,000,000 of people to thoſe rights which

which they had not been ſuffered to enjoy. We ſee in that kingdom an avowed determination to effect a Parliamentary Reform; and ſhould the queſtion be blinked here, we muſt conclude that the ſyſtem of corruption is become ſo bad, as to prevail over the wiſhes of the people—Who, then, muſt determine? the people at large, as the conſtituents of the Houſe of Commons, ought in caſes which regard their repreſentation, to be the ſole judges; and ſince there is no ſuperiour power to which the cauſe can be referred, they alone ought to determine. The interference of Peers in election, and the undue influence that has crept in, demand to be ſwept away. It is admitted by a writer to whoſe opinion this nation has paid univerſal deference, that if any part of the repreſentative body be not choſen by the people, that part vitiates and corrupts the whole.

It is ſingular enough, that about a century ago, 28 November 1693, a bill paſſed the Houſe of Lords for annual Parliaments, but was rejected in the Commons. That a bill for ſhortning the duration of Parliaments ſhould be again rejected in the Commons,

mons, would not be ſo ſingular, becauſe the influence of the Crown naturally makes ſeptennial Parliaments dependant. By the laws of England, one great advantage the people ſtill poſſeſs, that is, the liberty of examining and of cenſuring the conduct of Government, and of thoſe who adminiſter any particular branch of it, by the means of the preſs; they aſſure alſo to each individual the right to preſent petitions either to the King or to the two Houſes of Parliament; and moreover that of ſubmitting their complaints and obſervations, whatever they may be, to the tribunal of the public—a right formidable indeed to thoſe that govern, and a privilege that of courſe was not obtained without the greateſt difficulty. It would be needleſs to repeat to you the ſeverities of the Star-Chamber; hiſtory is full of them; on its own authority it uſed to find guilty all ſuch as had courage to write on matters of Government, in a ſtyle that was not congenial to the Court. It ſhould be alſo remembered, that after the abolition of this Chamber, the long Parliament revived the ordinances contrary to the liberty of the preſs.

We

We have now that great palladium of the liberty of the preſs, the right of juries to determine in matters of libel. I ſhall not here inquire whether that right has been abuſed or not — I ſhall leave this to perhaps ſome future diſcuſſion.

Your objections in regard to the time being improper, I hope I have ſufficiently made clear to you are ill founded. The abſurd idea of French principles obtaining in this country is entirely done away. Were there any that were before infected by them, the madneſs of the French, and the horrid abuſe they have made of liberty, muſt entirely make them change their opinions; nor can there be the leaſt fear of their mad example ever being an object of imitation in this country. But there is a danger, that when the reaſonable demands of the people are treated with contempt, when their petitions, praying for a redreſs of grievances, are deſpiſed; that an inſulted people may then rouſe from their lethargy, and from the deluſion into which they have been thrown, by artifice and miſrepreſentation, there is a danger leſt what they now quietly aſk for by prayer, they may be induced

hereafter to take by force. Timely conceſſion may ſave us from that anarchy, and from thoſe horrors, which we all ſo much deprecate and deplore.

I am no advocate for univerſal repreſentation; but by a Reform of Parliament, I am convinced that without the leaſt danger whatever to the Government, the preſent defective repreſentation may be rendered more adequate, and more conformable to the true ſpirit and intention of the conſtitution: that by ſhortning the duration of Parliaments, you will check the undue influence of the other two branches of the legiſlature upon the Commons; and that by effecting this, you will keep the three eſtates of the kingdom diſtinct and ſeparate. The only true means of preſerving the Government, and of making it efficient and permanent—It has been the faſhion to ſtyle the oppoſers of Reform the King's friends; but believe me, the true friends to the King are thoſe who wiſh to reſtore Parliament to its original purity. Then ſhould we ſee the King able to exert the patronage and prerogatives which the conſtitution has given him, to the reward of merit and abilities:

abilities :—we ſhould not ſee them ſurrendered into the hands of miniſters, to be employed to the purpoſes of influence and corruption—we ſhould hear of no diſſatisfaction in our armies and navies, that deſerving officers are held back from promotion, becauſe they have not Parliamentary intereſt. We ſhould not every day ſee boys put over the heads of veteran officers, becauſe they may be diſtantly related to ſome great man in office. In ſhort, we ſhould hear of no jobs, no tricks, no miniſterial manœuvres, to deceive and delude the people. The King would have more real power, and the people would be more happy. Inſtead of an augmentation of taxes, we ſhould ſoon find a diminution of them; and the induſtrious poor would be able to purchaſe thoſe neceſſaries for themſelves and families, many of which are now become too dear for them to obtain. But alas! becauſe ye are the majority of every nation, it has been too much the prevailing idea to keep you in ignorance, poverty, and oppreſſion. Peaceful as ye are in this country, and firmly attached to the King and conſtitution, ye have been calumniated,

abuſed,

abuſed and vilified, by the opprobrious appellation of " ſwiniſh multitude." But let not miniſters deceive themſelves; with whatever ſtyle of contempt they may affect to deſpiſe the complaints of the people, no man will be hardy enough to deſpiſe the voice of the Engliſh Nation; that that voice is about to raiſe itſelf, cannot be denied. We are taxed beyond out ſtrength, ruined in our credit and commerce, and plunged in a war, the reſult of which muſt evidently be an augmentation of theſe calamities. Dreadful then, as the proſpect is, the neceſſity of a ſpeedy Reform becomes more urgent; let us then ſet about it with firmneſs and moderation, before we are inflamed and irritated by an accumulation of diſtreſs, which we cannot now prevent.

I muſt again uſe the arguments of Junius, and ſhall conclude with what he has obſerved, and which ſeems now ſo well to apply.

" That the laſt argument of the People
" will carry perhaps more than perſuaſion
" to Parliament, or ſupplication to the
" Throne: the time is come when the
" body of the Engliſh people muſt aſſert
" their

" their own cauſe : conſcious of their
" ſtrength, and animated by a ſenſe of
" their duty, they will not ſurrender their
" birth-right to Miniſters, Parliaments,
" and Kings."

I am, my dear Sir,

Yours, &c. &c.

143386